

PHILOSOPHY AND POLITICS  
IN THE THOUGHT OF  
JOHN WYCLIF

STEPHEN E. LAHEY



**CAMBRIDGE**  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE  
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS  
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge, CB2 2RU, UK  
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA  
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia  
Ruiz de Alarcón 13, 28014 Madrid, Spain  
Dock House, The Waterfront, Cape Town 8001, South Africa

<http://www.cambridge.org>

© Stephen E. Lahey 2003

This book is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception  
and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements,  
no reproduction of any part may take place without  
the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2003

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

*Typeface* Bembo 11/12 pt      *System* L<sup>A</sup>T<sub>E</sub>X 2<sub>ε</sub> [TB]

*A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library*

ISBN 0 521 63346 X

## CONTENTS

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	page viii
<i>Abbreviations</i>	x
1 The historiography of Wyclif's <i>dominium</i> thought	i
2 Why <i>dominium</i> ?	24
3 Wyclif's realism and divine <i>dominium</i>	68
4 <i>Proprietas</i> in Wyclif's theory of <i>dominium</i>	108
5 <i>Iurisdictio</i> in civil <i>dominium</i>	147
6 On kingship	171
7 Conclusion	200
<i>Bibliography</i>	225
<i>Index</i>	233

## Chapter 1

# THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF WYCLIF'S DOMINIUM THOUGHT

In 1377, John Wyclif had need of powerful political support. He had been summoned to Saint Paul's by Archbishop Sudbury to account for heretical arguments threatening to the foundations of the church in England. So on February 19, Wyclif appeared at the arraignment with John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster and arguably the most powerful man in the kingdom. Wyclif, once an Oxford metaphysician, had become an associate of John of Gaunt two years earlier, and had begun arguing for the reduction of the church's political influence and her material wealth shortly thereafter. Gaunt was, and still is, widely believed to be eager to supplement his political power at the expense of the church, and Thomas Walsingham encourages us to believe that Gaunt's support of Wyclif that February afternoon was that of a patron for his valued servant.<sup>1</sup>

Had Gaunt been self-interestedly using Wyclif as his polemicist, he had made an odd choice. Wyclif's arguments for the absolute power of the king were framed neither in the theocratic kingship language of the Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Norman tradition, nor were they couched in the more contemporary Aristotelian terms favored by other champions of secular authority.<sup>2</sup> On the contrary, Wyclif used language that had, until then, usually been employed by papally sponsored churchmen. His arguments were framed in terms of Grace-founded *dominium*, redolent of Archbishop Richard Fitzralph's defense of ecclesiastical property-ownership.<sup>3</sup> Talk of Grace as the true source of earthly justice was part of an established Augustinian tradition in England that had its immediate foundation in

<sup>1</sup> Thomas Walsingham, *Chronicon Angliae*, ed. E. M. Thompson, Rolls Series 64 (London, 1874), p. 115; Walsingham, *Historia Anglicana*, ed. H. T. Riley, 20, *Rerum Britannicarum Medii Aevi Scriptores* R S 28 (London, 1862), vol. 1, pp. 324–5. See also Herbert Workman, *John Wyclif: A Study of the English Medieval Church* (Oxford, 1926), vol. 1, pp. 284–93; and Joseph Dahmus, *The Prosecution of John Wyclif* (New Haven, 1952), pp. 7–34.

<sup>2</sup> For the earlier, Christ-founded English tradition, see E. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies* (Princeton, 1957), pp. 42–61; and Janet Nelson, "Kingship and Empire," in *The Cambridge History of Medieval Political Thought 350–1450*, ed. J. H. Burns (Cambridge, 1988), pp. 239–42.

<sup>3</sup> See Katherine Walsh, *A Fourteenth-Century Scholar and Primate: Richard Fitzralph in Oxford, Avignon and Armagh* (Oxford, 1981).

*Philosophy and politics in the thought of John Wyclif*

the papal hierocratic thought of Giles of Rome.<sup>4</sup> While Wyclif's clerical opponents might have labored to refute Aristotelian arguments similar to those of John of Paris or Marsilius of Padua, dealing with terms that most English churchmen held dear to their hearts would not be difficult. Wyclif made it easier by using *dominium* to refer both to *proprietas*, which had been its chief reference in Fitzralph's thought, as well as to *iurisdictio*, which canonists had long since ceased to see as necessarily dominative.

Joseph Dahmus effectively argues that Gaunt was doing nothing more than providing support for a loyal servant of the Crown, suggesting that contemporary chroniclers' and more recent scholars' antipathy for Gaunt motivates the popular impression that Wyclif constructed his arguments on the duke's behalf.<sup>5</sup> What remains unresolved is why Oxford's most eminent philosopher would suddenly turn away from metaphysics and risk all by putting forth dangerous, possibly heretical, arguments about the present state of the church. Recent scholarship has suggested that Wyclif's motives were political, or that they were theologically founded, as was the Mertonian Bradwardine's anti-Pelagian *De Causa Dei* a generation earlier.<sup>6</sup> Wyclif's own account is not terribly helpful, for his only explicit reference to the shift of his attention is to note that he felt it was time to introduce practically applicable issues to his theoretical pursuits.<sup>7</sup>

One way to understand Wyclif's interest in practical matters is to discover why *dominium* had captured his attention, for he makes occasional reference to it in his *Tractatus de Universalibus*, the last of his expressly metaphysical treatises. Why Wyclif used *dominium* as the concept central to his political writing has not been addressed. Given the English Augustinian tradition's century-old association with Grace-founded *dominium*, it is sensible to wonder what prompted Wyclif to appropriate it for his own, apparently unorthodox, purposes. If there were significant grounds for Wyclif's use of the concept in his earlier, more traditionally scholastic thought, we might be able to understand better the place of *dominium* in his political thought.

If the goal is to see why Wyclif appropriated Grace-founded *dominium* as the concept to wield in his political writings, it is tempting to suppose

<sup>4</sup> A. Gwynn, *The English Austin Friars in the Time of Wyclif* (Oxford, 1940); W. A. Pantin, *The English Church in the Fourteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1955).

<sup>5</sup> Dahmus, *The Prosecution of John Wyclif*, p. 19. For a discussion of John of Gaunt's tendency to lend his support to those in his service in need of it, see Simon Walker, *The Lancastrian Affinity 1361–1399* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 94–116.

<sup>6</sup> For discussion of recent scholarship, see below, pp. 10–23. See Thomas Bradwardine, *De Causa Dei contra Pelagium et De Virtute Causarum*, ed. H. Saville (London, 1618), I.35.308C.

<sup>7</sup> "[T]empus est mihi per totum residuum vite mee tam speculative quam practice, secundum mensuram quam Deus donaverit, inniti virtutibus, ut sic salubrius discam mori." *De Dominio Divino*, ed. R. L. Poole (London, 1890), Incipit, 1.6–8.

### *The historiography of Wyclif's dominium thought*

that his aim was to hoist the papacy and its supporters with their own petard. But this raises more problems than it answers, for it suggests that Wyclif, a priest and theologian, would subvert his theology by using it for mundane ends, namely the glorification of secular power. This casts a doubtful aura on all of his later works, which were devoted to expressly theological issues. Secondly, this answer avoids the difficulty of the question of how *dominium* can involve both *proprietas* and *iurisdictio* by explaining it all as so much cynical political maneuvering. This is unsettling, because Wyclif's use of the term *dominium* is recognizably in line with, and to a degree founded in, Fitzralph's in *De Pauperie Salvatoris*. Fitzralph's position is a mixture of Augustinian theology, hierocratic papal theory, canon law, and Aristotelian political thought designed to show that the Franciscans could not rightly claim to practice apostolic poverty without relying on the church's material *dominium*. Are we to suppose that an accomplished metaphysician and theologian took this position and used it to his own private ends, without paying serious attention to the philosophical consequences of doing so? And if he did this, why did Wyclif devote such care to the relationship of Creator to Creation in *De Dominio Divino*, going so far as to make his metaphysical realism, as it appears in the *Tractatus de Universalibus*, consonant with it?

To understand why Wyclif characterized his union of theological and political thought in terms of a *dominium* that combined both *proprietas* and *iurisdictio*, we must do several things. First, we should ask whether other philosophers before him had done this. We have already mentioned that Fitzralph framed his thought in these terms; tracing the development of the tendency to frame political discourse in this specific theological language will better prepare us to argue that Wyclif was doing more than trying to make a name for himself among monarchists. Second, we should look carefully at the substance and argument of both *De Dominio Divino* and *De Civili Dominio*. What aspects of each of these works unite the two, and what aspects refer back to his metaphysics? Can we use Wyclif's metaphysical and theological language to explain his political thought as a coherent realization of his philosophical program?

Wyclif was a confirmed realist about universals, believing that individual created beings have their reality by virtue of the prior being of universals. He wrote the *dominium* treatises shortly after having finished writing *Tractatus de Universalibus*, his clearest explanation of the reality of universals. Are there sufficient grounds for holding that he believed the divine *dominium* relation functions as a universal, from which individual instances of just human *dominium* derive their reality? If sufficient grounds for this argument exist, it is reasonable to suppose that Wyclif would have been aware of the possibility of his educated readers recognizing

### *Philosophy and politics in the thought of John Wyclif*

this structure, and understanding the argument of *De Civili Dominio* as a practical articulation of his realism. This would mean that his radical conclusions, including the need for a strong, Grace-favored civil lord or king to reduce the office-holders of the church to Christ-like poverty, were evident as wholly consistent with a realism evocative of Augustine's own thought.

To show this, we must look at *dominium* as Wyclif does, as the relation between Creator and Creation most expressive of the on-going governance and maintenance God provides for his creatures. We will examine the definition of *dominium* Wyclif provides in *De Dominio Divino* as founded in his metaphysics, and as it plays out in his thought on how men ought to live together. Next, we shall look at the *dominium* described in *De Civili Dominio* as a concept entailing both private ownership and political jurisdiction. If these two issues are explicable as articulations of Wyclif's realism by contributing to the conception of *dominium* as a clear causal connection between divine and just human *dominium*, it is difficult to avoid concluding that his conception of just human *dominium* is related to God's *dominium* as is a particular to a universal. This will show how unfounded are the charges that Wyclif's political writings are philosophically unrelated to his metaphysics, that they are monarchist apologetics, motivated primarily by events that occurred in his life. It will also provide a framework with which to approach the texts themselves. Philosophers will be able to understand how the last of the great English schoolmen viewed the relation of *theoria* to *praxis*, and will have the opportunity to see how holding a unique metaphysical realism about universals can lead to social conclusions not usually associated with metaphysics. Medievalists of all stripes will thus be able to understand the intellectual tenor of Oxford's last great light of the age, and they will be free to interpret Lollardy and the Hussite movement in the terms set and defined by the two movements' progenitor.

Some efforts to explain Wyclif's thought on *dominium* as it is expressed in *De Dominio Divino* and *De Civili Dominio* have been colored by desires to have it cohere with his later, more explicitly polemical writing. Rather than study these works to see how they fit in the body of Wyclif's work, this study will examine them for their philosophical content and reliance on his earlier metaphysics. While it will show that these two works are founded in Wyclif's realism as it appears in the *Tractatus de Universalibus*, this study is not meant to suggest that the *dominium* treatises make up a part of the broader, theological program established in the *Summa Theologie*.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Wyclif's two chief Latin works are the *Summa de Ente* and the *Summa Theologie*. The *Summa de Ente* includes most of his metaphysical works, including the *Tractatus de Universalibus*, and was

## *The historiography of Wyclif's dominium thought*

Peter Brown has suggested, regarding Augustine's thought on religious coercion, that we cease looking for one set doctrine, and instead be open to the shifts and developments in positions characteristic of an active thinker.<sup>9</sup> This might prove a more useful way of handling Wyclif's thought on *dominium* with regard to the bulk of his writings, for it figures as something more than what we now consider to be political theory, while more practically orientated than straight theology.

This chapter will serve as an overture in which we briefly survey the scholarship relating to Wyclif's political thought, beginning with analysis of the scholars responsible for introducing him to twentieth-century eyes. As the study of the history of medieval philosophy has grown more philosophically sophisticated, some thinkers like Wyclif have received less attention than the complexity and theological innovation of their work deserve. The reasons for this vary, ranging from a vested institutional interest in more theologically orthodox thinkers to the relative absence of edited versions of later fourteenth-century philosophical texts. Most twentieth-century scholars of Wyclif's thought have concluded that his metaphysics has no bearing on his *dominium* treatises. It will be best if we lay out their conclusions and their reasoning, not only to give us a starting point for our own discussion, but also to show how contemporary historians of thought have approached Wyclif's philosophy.

Following this introduction, we will assess the influence of several figures whose ideas were influential on Wyclif's realism, or on his political thought, or on both, including Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Giles of Rome, and Archbishop Richard Fitzralph. This discussion will outline Wyclif's place in the philosophical dialogue, and provide a perspective from which to understand specific aspects of Wyclif's theory. In the third chapter we will recount the argument of *De Dominio Divino*, both as a carefully articulated piece of philosophy in its own right, as it is related to the earlier *Tractatus de Universalibus*, and as it will relate to *De Civili Dominio*. Here we will examine how the realism articulated in *De Universalibus* is borne out in Wyclif's conception of God's *dominium* over Creation and its relation to just *dominium* in Creation. Understanding how the determinist metaphysics of *De Universalibus* relates theologically and

written while Wyclif was in Oxford, between 1365 and 1372. Williel Thomson describes the *Summa Theologie* as an "extended dissection of the leading religious and political problems of his day, seen through the lens of an Augustinian realist." *De Civili Dominio* and related ecclesiastical and social writings comprise the early treatises of this *Summa*, which was written between 1375 and 1381. While *De Dominio Divino* is not included in the *Summa Theologie*, having been written just after Wyclif completed the *Summa de Ente*, it serves as the beginning point for this *Summa's* arguments. See Williel Thomson, *The Latin Writings of John Wyclif* (Toronto, 1983), pp. 18–88.

<sup>9</sup> Peter Brown, "St. Augustine's Attitude to Religious Coercion," *Journal of Roman Studies*, 54 (1964), p. 107.



### *Philosophy and politics in the thought of John Wyclif*

philosophically to his *dominium* thought is also important, for at least one scholar has argued that Wyclif's political agenda is unrealizable because of it.<sup>10</sup> Accordingly, we will examine both the foundation of Wyclif's determinism and its implications for his thought on *dominium*. Finally, we will look at other treatises of Wyclif's *Summa Theologie* contemporary with the two *dominium* treatises, notably *De Statu Innocencie* and *De Mandatis Divinis*, insofar as they are useful in helping us to unravel the arguments of the two principal works in question.

At this point, we will be set to explore Wyclif's thought regarding just human *dominium* as expressed in *De Civili Dominio* and also in the related work *De Officio Regis*. We will look first, in a fourth chapter, at what Wyclif says about the institution of private ownership in postlapsarian society, for this topic directs his thought on kingship as such. Wyclif devotes half of *De Civili Dominio* to explaining his thought about the evils of private ownership for members of Christ's body on earth, and the other half to explaining why it is important that just civil lords, owners of large amounts of property, should be Grace-favored, and how they should relieve the church of its material burdens. Wyclif believes Grace should function as a precondition of just private ownership, and that private ownership is a sin-stained perversion of the communal state of Eden, and resolving this apparent contradiction is necessary to a complete understanding of his thought on *dominium*. Further, Wyclif's concept of private ownership has direct bearing on our understanding of his later works, most importantly *De Ecclesia*, which was to be particularly influential in the Hussite movement.

This done, we will be ready to analyze in a fifth chapter Wyclif's picture of the duties and nature of civil *dominium*, which is functionally equivalent to kingship. His description of a monarch who must serve and protect his realm as well as the church therein has all the trappings of monarchic absolutism. But Wyclif's picture of kingship has Christian *caritas* as its chief characteristic; we will see how this is related to his thought on Grace as a precondition for just civil *dominium*. Consequently, it will be evident that this conception of the lord–subject relation is indicative of his view of the way that just human *dominium* functions as an instantiation of divine *dominium*. Thus, we will have discussed civil *dominium* in terms of *proprietas* and *iurisdictio*, and we will see how Wyclif believed these two concepts to be necessarily connected.

In a final chapter we will be set to conclude by showing how Wyclif's joint conception of private ownership and political power in just civil *dominium* depends upon his thought on divine *dominium*, which, in turn,

<sup>10</sup> Gordon Leff, *Heresy in the Later Middle Ages* (New York, 1967).

### *The historiography of Wyclif's dominium thought*

is explicable only in terms of his metaphysical realism. This will allow us to characterize the status of divine *dominium* as being a universal in which all instances of just human *dominium* participate as instantiations in terms fully compatible with Wyclif's definitions. Many students of England in the later Middle Ages have had to come to grips with the phenomenon of Lollardy. A careful examination of Wyclif's *dominium* treatises will allow us to make some headway in two important aspects of the study of this unique heresy. First, we shall be able to analyze the validity of the following hypothetical syllogism:

- (a) If one adheres to a Wycliffite realist metaphysics, one can coherently adhere to the social/political conclusions of the *dominium* treatises.
- (b) If one coherently adheres to the social/political conclusions of the *dominium* treatises, one can consistently embrace the political notions of early Lollardy.

Therefore, if one adheres to a Wycliffite realist metaphysics, one can coherently embrace the political notions of early Lollardy.

This does not mean that all Lollards were metaphysical realists, nor that all Lollards had read the *dominium* treatises. But it does point to a potential causal relationship between metaphysics and a *praxis*-oriented movement that would imply that modern scholars have been premature in their assessments of the relevance of Wyclif's metaphysics to his later thought.

#### MEDIEVAL POLITICAL THEORY'S RELATION TO SCHOLASTIC METAPHYSICS

An important element in the scholarship concerning medieval political thought has been the understanding of its relation to medieval metaphysics. Martin Grabmann's 1934 characterization of the relation of a philosopher's respective Augustinianism or Aristotelianism to his respective papalism or monarchism served as a landmark in this study.<sup>11</sup> He argued that political philosophers who advocated the supremacy of faith tended towards papalism, and those who desired to strike a balance between faith and reason generally favored a Thomistic Aristotelian compromise between monarchy and papacy, while those who saw reason as autonomous supported a lay monarchy founded on the consent of the governed. Grabmann divided philosophers who wrote on recognizably political issues into Augustinian hierocratic theorists, Thomistic

<sup>11</sup> Martin Grabmann, *Studien über den Einfluss der aristotelischen Philosophie auf die mittelalterlichen Theorien über das Verhältnis von Kirche und Staat*, Sitzungsberichte der bayrischen Akademie der wissenschaften, Phil.-Hist. Abteilung, Heft 2 (Munich, 1934).

*Philosophy and politics in the thought of John Wyclif*

Aristotelians, and Averroist Aristotelians. In the first group he includes Guido Vernani, Ptolemy of Lucca, Augustinus Triumphus, Giles of Rome, and James of Viterbo.<sup>12</sup> In the next, he includes Aquinas and John of Paris.<sup>13</sup> And in the group advocating reason's autonomy he includes Marsilius of Padua and William Ockham.<sup>14</sup> It is not hard to see a certain tendency: the Aristotelians tend towards monarchism, while the Augustinians tend towards papalism.

The most fully developed response to Grabmann's approach appeared in Alan Gewirth's "Philosophy and Political Thought in the Fourteenth Century."<sup>15</sup> He argues that it is simplistic to line up realists with extreme papal sovereignty and hierocratic theory, and nominalists with monarchism, and moderate realists with a "two spheres" argument.<sup>16</sup> Gewirth agrees that Wyclif belongs in the Augustinian political tradition, and recognizes his reliance on Giles' hierocratic thinking, but points out that Wyclif's conclusions are an equally Augustinian species of anti-hierocratic reasoning. Gewirth is not arguing that no connection exists between philosophy and practical politics, only that agreement in practical politics does not necessarily entail a correlative agreement in metaphysics. He suggests that Wyclif and Marsilius of Padua, though certainly in agreement regarding several desired political outcomes, can by no means be said to share the same values.<sup>17</sup> Gewirth argues that historical conditions warrant careful consideration in any attempt to relate philosophical doctrine with political program, and that one cannot suppose either metaphysics or political theory to be so open to correlativity as to allow adherence to one sort of belief to dictate adherence to another. In some thinkers, theoretical and practical philosophy were arguably correlative, while in others such an argument is bound to involve stretching the truth to the breaking point. It is best, Gewirth suggests, to take it on a case-by-case basis.

Michael Wilks' *The Problem of Sovereignty in the Later Middle Ages* effectively supports Grabmann's thesis that a tendency towards metaphysical realism was directly proportional to a tendency towards the papal hierocratic position.<sup>18</sup> Wilks suggests that Grabmann's approach is useful in illustrating how medieval positions on universals had real political implications, leading one to recognize the social import of the scholastic metaphysical disputes. Adherence to realism means recognizing that the

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 61–129.    <sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 8–40.    <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 41–60.

<sup>15</sup> Alan Gewirth, "Philosophy and Political Thought in the Fourteenth Century," in *The Forward Movement of the Fourteenth Century*, ed. F. L. Utley (Columbus, OH, 1961), pp. 125–64.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 134.    <sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 141.

<sup>18</sup> Michael Wilks, *The Problem of Sovereignty in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1963), p. 17, also p. 84.

### *The historiography of Wyclif's dominium thought*

church is an Augustinian whole more important than its members.<sup>19</sup> Accordingly, we would assume that Wyclif's political thought and his earlier metaphysics were either unconnected, or that one of the two projects was not in earnest, for Wyclif is at once a realist about universals and an anti-hierocratic, ecclesiastically reforming monarchist. B. Wilkinson refers to Wyclif as an extremist in matters of religious reform while a political moderate; can one reconcile this with his earlier, hearty realism about universals?<sup>20</sup> Wilks believed that one could, and set about addressing this problem. In so doing he set the tone for further discussion of the relation of Wyclif's Oxford metaphysics of the *Summa de Ente* to the political and reformist thought of the *Summa Theologie*.

Charles Zuckerman rightly points out that regarding the church as a universal of some sort is not commensurate with the medieval view of the church's nature.<sup>21</sup> Zuckerman suggests that Wilks' intuition, based on Grabmann and Otto von Guericke, is not wholly ill-founded; many of the important positions regarding the place of the church in the world were formulated by philosophers who had well-developed metaphysical standpoints, and it would be natural to look for some sort of connection. Better, though, to look to other possible explanations for the political opinions of these philosophers, for it is as likely that they formulated their ecclesiological thought for political reasons as for ontological ones.<sup>22</sup> Wyclif's case will allow for at least one instance of such a connection, but the universal in question is not the church, but divine *dominium* itself.<sup>23</sup>

#### A CENTURY OF WYCLIF SCHOLARSHIP

An outline of the chronology of Wyclif's Latin works will be useful in gaining fuller appreciation of the assessments of Wyclif scholars of the relations between the treatises. We are aware of ten expressly philosophical treatises that Wyclif wrote between 1360 and 1372, including three logical works (*De Logica*, *Logice Continuacio*, and *De Logica Tractatus Tercius*) and

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>20</sup> Cited in L. J. Daly's "Wyclif's Political Theory: A Century of Study," *Medievalia et Humanistica*, 4 (1973), p. 183; see B. Wilkinson, *Constitutional History of England 1216-1399*, 3 vols. (London, 1948-58), vol. 3, pp. 92-4.

<sup>21</sup> Charles Zuckerman, "The Relationship of Theories of Universals to Theories of Church Government in the Middle Ages: A Critique of Previous Views," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 35 (1975), pp. 579-94, here pp. 591-2.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 594.

<sup>23</sup> Zuckerman notes Wilks' argument that Wyclif's monarchism is evidence of the possibility of his conversion from realism to nominalism (which I will examine below), and pays little attention to Wyclif thereafter. cf. *ibid.*, p. 585, n. 12.

### *Philosophy and politics in the thought of John Wyclif*

seven metaphysical works, which include the massive *Summa de Ente* and the *Tractatus de Universalibus*.<sup>24</sup> In 1373 he wrote *De Dominio Divino*, which served as the beginning point for the *Summa Theologie*, which he began in 1375 and ceased work on in 1381. In this latter *Summa* are his politically and ecclesiastically reformatory works, as well as treatises on scriptural interpretation and the Eucharist. We will examine the earlier works of the *Summa Theologie*, including *De Mandatis Divinis* (early 1376), *De Statu Innocencie* (mid-1376), *De Civili Dominio* (1375–76), *De Ecclesia* (1378–79), and *De Officio Regis* (mid-1379).<sup>25</sup>

The end of the nineteenth century saw a rebirth in interest in Wyclif's thought, and most of the Latin works now available were edited by the now-defunct Wyclif Society. The first important piece of modern Wyclif scholarship was G. V. Lechler's *Johann Wyclif und die Vorgeschichte der Reformation*, which contributed most in its biographical sketch of Wyclif.<sup>26</sup> R. L. Poole, later the editor of *De Divino Dominio* and of several volumes of *De Civili Dominio*, laid the groundwork for the Grace-founded *dominium* reading of Wyclif's political thought in two works, *Illustrations of the History of Medieval Thought and Learning*, and *Wycliffe and Movements for Reform*.<sup>27</sup> In neither does Poole consider there to be an important connection between Wyclif's metaphysics and his political thought; Poole's contribution is his understanding of the relation of Fitzralph's *De Pauperie Salvatoris* to Wyclif's thought, and of the importance of *dominium* in Wyclif's *Summa Theologie*. Johann Loserth's "The Beginnings of Wyclif's Activity in Ecclesiastical Politics" did much to found the contemporary belief among Wyclif scholars that ecclesiastically reformatory concerns were absent from Wyclif's mind before 1376.<sup>28</sup> Another contribution to the general scholarly attitude towards Wyclif's political thought was made in C. H. McIlwain's *Growth of Political Thought in the West*. Perhaps following Poole's lead, McIlwain dismisses Wyclif's originality and relevance

<sup>24</sup> See Thomson, *The Latin Writings of John Wyclif*, pp. 1–39, for dating, manuscript description, and bibliographical information.

<sup>25</sup> See Thomson, *The Latin Writings of John Wyclif*, pp. 39–62.

<sup>26</sup> G. V. Lechler, *Johann Wyclif und die Vorgeschichte der Reformation*, 2 Vols. (Leipzig, 1873); translated and abridged by Peter Loruner as *John Wycliffe and his English Precursors* (London, 1873). Lechler's characterization of Wyclif's philosophy is heavily reliant on *Trilogus*, evidence of the need for the editions provided by the Wyclif Society. See also Daly, "Wyclif's Political Theory: A Century of Study," pp. 177–87. John Lewis' earlier *The History of the Life and Sufferings of the Reverend and Learned John Wyclif, D.D.* (Oxford, 1820) was meant to counter then-current Roman Catholic partisan histories in which Wyclif was dismissed, along with Hus and Jerome of Prague, as a "pretended Reformer."

<sup>27</sup> R. L. Poole, *Illustrations of the History of Medieval Thought and Learning* (London, 1884), and *Wycliffe and Movements for Reform* (London, 1902).

<sup>28</sup> Johann Loserth, "The Beginnings of Wyclif's Activity in Ecclesiastical Politics," *English Historical Review*, 11 (April 1896); cf. L. J. Daly, *The Political Theory of John Wyclif* (Chicago, 1962), pp. 177–8.

### *The historiography of Wyclif's dominium thought*

in understanding the developments of late fourteenth-century political thought.<sup>29</sup>

Wyclif's chief biographer is H. B. Workman, who believed that his thought on *dominium* as expressed in *De Dominio Divino* and *De Civili Dominio* was the culmination of several years of thinking, the formulation of which led naturally to closer attention to ecclesiastical matters.<sup>30</sup> He warns that one should avoid supposing Wyclif to have written political theory to provide "programmes of actual reconstruction," advising us to read him as we might read Plato or More. Did Wyclif seriously suppose his works would involve a radical up-turning of social order? Workman thinks not, believing the metaphysics undergirding *De Civili Dominio* to be what really interested its writer.<sup>31</sup> Workman's assessment of Wyclif's *dominium* treatises is colored by his belief that much of *De Dominio Divino* has been lost, and his picture of civil *dominium* is brief, serving only to show why Wyclif's ecclesiastical audience reacted the way they did. His discussion of *De Officio Regis* follows directly on a recounting of the major points of *De Ecclesia*, and neglects the ties linking the former to the works specifically about *dominium*.

Although a sustained review of the scholarship concerning Wyclif's metaphysics is not within the immediate scope of this discussion, it will be useful to note the most influential works for their insight into Wyclif's *dominium* thought.<sup>32</sup> S. Harrison Thomson's "The Philosophical Basis of Wyclif's Theology" describes Wyclif's thought as a continuous whole, ranging from the first books of the *Summa de Ente* through the last tractates of the *Summa Theologie*, and beyond (though perhaps not inclusive of Wyclif's polemical tracts). Although not a developed topical analysis of any of the issues important to Wyclif's metaphysics, Thomson refers to the connections between his theory of universals and his later reformative goals as evident to any careful reader of Wyclif's work.<sup>33</sup> Thomson's goal is to show how certain of Wyclif's metaphysical presuppositions,

<sup>29</sup> C. H. McIlwain, *The Growth of Political Thought in the West* (New York, 1932), pp. 315–17.

<sup>30</sup> Herbert B. Workman, *John Wyclif: A Study of the English Medieval Church* (Oxford, 1926), vol. 2, p. 3; for a summary of Wyclif's thought as it appears in *De Dominio Divino* and *De Civili Dominio*, see *ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 257–66; for *De Officio Regis*, see *ibid.*, vol. 2, pp. 20–30.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 259.

<sup>32</sup> See J. A. Robson's *Wyclif and the Oxford Schools* (Cambridge, 1961). Anthony Kenny's *Wyclif in his Times* (Oxford, 1986) contains several useful articles; his "The Realism of the *Tractatus de Universalibus*" is an abridgement of his descriptive *Wyclif* (Oxford, 1985). See also Norman Kretzman's "Continua, Indivisibles, and Change in Wyclif's Logic of Scripture," in Kenny's *Wyclif in his Times*, pp. 31–67; P. V. Spade's introduction to Kenny's translation of *Tractatus de Universalibus* (*On Universals* [Oxford, 1985]), and Alessandro Conti, "Analogy and Formal Distinction: The Logical Basis of Wyclif's Metaphysics," *Medieval Philosophy and Theology*, 6 (1997), pp. 133–65.

<sup>33</sup> S. Harrison Thomson, "The Philosophical Basis of Wyclif's Theology," *Journal of Religion*, 11 (1931), pp. 86–116, here p. 89.

### *Philosophy and politics in the thought of John Wyclif*

primarily his realism regarding universals, drove him to the conclusions about God's unmediated power over Creation. Thomson also makes note of Wyclif's spatio-temporal atomism, which he argues led to a rejection of transubstantiation, and of Wyclif's views on modal notions of possibility and necessity, which tied into his belief that only the Elect could hope for Grace. Thomson does little more than mention these subjects, though, as premises to sustain his conclusion that Wyclif's thought is consistent throughout.

The landmark work on Wyclif's overall philosophical approach is J. A. Robson's *Wyclif and the Oxford Schools*.<sup>34</sup> Robson shows Wyclif's indebtedness to the thought of Thomas Buckingham's anti-Pelagian Augustinianism and to Archbishop Richard Fitzralph's authority regarding the general nature of the relation of God to humanity. The complexity of the *Summa de Ente* calls for some picture of what Wyclif had in mind when composing the individual treatises, and Robson's survey of the *Summa*'s structure provides a philosophically tenable one. Robson's assessment is that Wyclif's metaphysics indicate "a cautious and conservative Oxford don," someone more interested in affirming orthodoxy than in reforming it. Robson notes that his desire to gain an overview of Wyclif's metaphysics has caused him to stop just short of the really interesting part of Wyclif's thought, namely the "interweaving of Wyclif's polemics with his scholasticism . . . the fascinating psychology of the don in politics . . ." <sup>35</sup> He steadfastly avoids discussing the teachings of the *Summa Theologie*, and leaves the reader with the sense that so fully developed a philosophical mind as Wyclif's was sure to bring into its consideration of extra-metaphysical matters its rigorous approach, if nothing else.

Michael Wilks' study of John Wyclif's political thought is the only instance of an analysis that is careful to include as much of Wyclif's thought as possible while interpreting the political theory as a serious enterprise. Two main directions in which Wilks has developed his analysis deserve our attention, namely, his argument that Wyclif's political thought is in fact a valid pro-monarchic position, and his assessment of the relation of Wyclif's earlier metaphysics to that political stance. Wilks began his study of Wyclif by showing that Wyclif really does want readers of the *Summa Theologie* to carry out his radical advice.<sup>36</sup> Shortly before his death, Wilks published a discussion of Wyclif's influence as a prophet in the Joachimite

<sup>34</sup> See n. 32, above. <sup>35</sup> *Wyclif and the Oxford Schools*, p. 218.

<sup>36</sup> Michael Wilks, "Predestination, Property, and Power: Wyclif's Theory of Dominion and Grace," in *SCH*, 2 (London, 1965), pp. 220–36. See also Anne Hudson, ed., *Wyclif: Political Ideas and Practice, Papers by Michael Wilks* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 16–32.

*The historiography of Wyclif's dominium thought*

tradition, further emphasizing Wyclif's dedication to social reform as a product of his broader theological and philosophical system.<sup>37</sup>

What are we to make of a social theory that "seems to be justifying something not far short of anarchy?"<sup>38</sup> Wyclif has been accused of providing an unoriginal rehash of the established principle that divine *iustitia* should be behind all human rule.<sup>39</sup> He has also been accused of being unclear about how to distinguish between the Grace-favored Elect and the Damned, and of having devised his thesis in order to support the expropriation of the clergy by the laity, just as Fitzralph had used it against the Friars Minor, with neither author having shown how a connection was to be made between the righteous and the expropriators.<sup>40</sup> These are practical questions about the applicability of Wyclif's thought that certainly needed to be addressed, and Wilks effectively addressed them by showing that Wyclif's critics underestimate his shrewdness and perspicacity. He argued that Wyclif was not really concerned with distinguishing between the Elect and the Damned, that he was content to leave such distinctions to God. He attributed to Wyclif the position that "human life *secundum praesentem iustitiam* bore little relationship to the realities of the divine world; that there were two levels of truth, human and divine, co-existent but contradictory; that, in effect, human life could be considered with but small reference to God."<sup>41</sup> While Augustinian in its approach, this implies that God participates minimally in the ongoing drama of secular political life. Wilks downplayed the import of Wyclif's thought on ownership, arguing that his condemnation of ecclesiastical private ownership is really a *de facto* endorsement of the superior public right of the king's power as both prince and priest.<sup>42</sup> But he dismissed Wyclif's

<sup>37</sup> Michael Wilks, "Wyclif and the Great Persecution," *Prophecy and Eschatology*, ed. Wilks, *SCH Subsidia* 10, (London, 1994), pp. 39–63. See also Anne Hudson, ed., *Wyclif: Political Ideas and Practice*, pp. 179–204.

<sup>38</sup> Wilks, "Predestination, Property and Power," p. 223.

<sup>39</sup> Wilks refers to W. A. Dunning, *History of Political Theories: Ancient and Medieval* (New York, 1905), p. 264; McIlwain, *The Growth of Political Thought*, and R. W. and A. J. Carlyle, *A History of Political Thought in the West* (New York, 1932), vol. 5, pp. 51–63; accusations that Wyclif's thought is Utopian at best, anarchic at worst are evident throughout the literature on Wyclif, as we will briefly discuss below.

<sup>40</sup> See Gwynn, *The English Austin Friars in the Time of Wyclif*, pp. 59–73, 234–6; and Knowles, *The Religious Orders in England*, vol. 2, pp. 61–8.

<sup>41</sup> Wilks, "Predestination, Property and Power," p. 229. "The result was to leave man – at least within the limits of this mortal life – as the virtual master of his own world."

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 234–5. "What he [Wyclif] deplored was the notion that private property rights were immutable – that there was a perpetual *civile dominium* inherent in ecclesiastical tenure – which would effectively deny the superior public right – the divine lordship – of the king's grace . . . the very familiar features of an ecclesiastical polity over which the prince stands supreme as king and priest."



*Philosophy and politics in the thought of John Wyclif*

theological justifications for his condemnation of the institution of private ownership as a smoke-screen enabling him to resurrect the old model of a theocratic monarchy, or, Wilks suspects, to presage a Tudor-style absolutism.<sup>43</sup>

The fullest of Wilks' explications of the mechanics of Wyclif's civil *dominium* theory is his 1972 discussion of Wyclif as proto-reformer.<sup>44</sup> This is also the most radical of Wilks' interpretations of Wyclif as the advocate of a Tudor-like reform of the English church. Here Wilks emphasizes the differences between Wyclif's recognizably Augustinian attitudes towards obviously theological issues, and his less recognizably Augustinian and more Aristotelian endorsement of the civil lord's holding of absolute temporal power over all subjects, ecclesiastical and secular.<sup>45</sup> Wilks argues that the reform that Wyclif calls for is largely a political reorganization of power, with doctrinal reform being little more than an after-effect of the king's actions. In this argument, Wyclif's ecclesiology serves as a means to political ends, in which the king is regarded as final temporal authority in all venues, sacred and secular.<sup>46</sup> Seen in this light, Wyclif is less a political philosopher than a revolutionary, heralding a top-down revolution to be undertaken by a *junta* of theologians who enjoy the complete trust of the civil lord.<sup>47</sup>

In 1969 Wilks addressed the possibility that Wyclif had formulated definite political ideas while still at Oxford, in the early 1370s. Following Grabmann's dictum that papalists are realists while monarchists are nominalists, Wilks argued that Wyclif had renounced the ontological realism of the *Summa de Ente* by the time he had come to write the *dominium* treatises. He begins his arguments referring to those occasional passages in Wyclif's later works wherein he laments his earlier, youthful digressions; in the past scholars have taken this to imply that Wyclif had earlier been swayed by Ockhamist metaphysics.<sup>48</sup> Indeed, Wyclif admits

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 235; see also "Royal Patronage and Anti-Papalism," in *From Ockham to Wyclif*, ed. A. Hudson and M. Wilks, *SCH* Subsidia 5 (London, 1987), pp. 135–63. See also Hudson, ed., *Wyclif: Political Ideas and Practice*, pp. 117–46.

<sup>44</sup> "Reformatio Regni: Wyclif and Hus as Leaders of Religious Protest Movements," *SCH*, 9 (London, 1972), pp. 109–30. See also Hudson, ed., *Wyclif: Political Ideas and Practice*, pp. 63–84.

<sup>45</sup> "Reformatio Regni," p. 116. Note the implicit reliance on Grabmann's misleading polarization of "Aristotelianism" and "Augustinianism."

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 118–19. <sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 124.

<sup>48</sup> Wilks, "The Early Oxford Wyclif: Papalist or Nominalist?" *SCH*, 5 (London, 1969), pp. 69–98. Wilks refers to M. H. Dziewicki, "An Essay on Wyclif's Philosophical System," *Johannis Wyclif Miscellanea Philosophica*, 2 vols. (London, 1902), vol. 1, pp. v–xxvii, and to numerous other scholarly comments on this philosophical turn, all of whom took Wyclif to have been referring to Ockhamist metaphysics. See also Hudson, ed., *Wyclif: Political Ideas and Practice*, pp. 33–62.

*The historiography of Wyclif's dominium thought*

to having been mistaken about universals,<sup>49</sup> hylomorphism, theory of time,<sup>50</sup> and predestination,<sup>51</sup> among other topics.<sup>52</sup> Wilks suggests that Wyclif's errors in his youth were not metaphysical ones in the Ockhamist camp, but those of excessive realism about universals, and that as he abandoned his ill-fitting realism, he also abandoned his hierarchic papalism. After all, Wyclif reports himself as being, in his early days, an advocate of a hard-line interpretation of God's omnipotence, which is consonant with the papal hierocratic argument of papal sovereignty. Is it but coincidental that, as Wyclif embraced a more royalist program, he veered away from the idea that God's will directs all human and, indeed, all created action? This is consonant with Wilks' argument regarding God's relative non-interference in secular politics, suggesting a tendency to view Wyclif's theological justifications for the king having absolute material power as being subordinated to Wyclif's more material, political opinions. Given the utility of Aristotelian methods in resolving problems that Wyclif claims to have bedeviled him in his youth, and given Wyclif's occasional admission of the utility of these methods, Wilks finds it reasonable to assume that a kind of Thomistic compromise concerning a host of philosophical issues germinated in Wyclif's mind, along with which came monarchist sympathies, like a stow-away.<sup>53</sup> Wilks' argument relied heavily on the assumption that only an Aristotelian, and an Ockhamist at that, could argue as fervently as Wyclif does in favor of secular monarchy. Wilks did not entertain the possibility that Gewirth was right to deny a causative connection between ontological nominalism and monarchism, leaving him free to argue what he recognized to be a difficult position, given the lack of evidence for ontological nominalism in Wyclif's *dominium* treatises.<sup>54</sup>

In "Wyclif and the Great Persecution," Wilks explored the possibilities that Wyclif's theology is genuine, that his political theory is an outgrowth of his theological conclusions, and that his metaphysics is not nominalist. Here he argued that Wyclif's most important thought came directly after the *dominium* treatises, particularly *De Veritate Sacrae Scripturae*. In these works, Wilks suggests, Wyclif's debt to chiliastic Joachimite theology translates into a reformative vision in which no mortal power is able

<sup>49</sup> *Tractatus de Universalibus*, ed. Ivan J. Mueller (Oxford, 1985), 10: "Et sic quando fui iunior involvebam ignoranter universalia sicut forte faciunt multi hodie qui pertinaciter universalia detestantur . . ."; also cited in Thomson, "Philosophical Basis," p. 89; Robson, *Wyclif and the Oxford Schools*, p. 145.

<sup>50</sup> *De Scientia Dei*, as discussed by Robson, *Wyclif and the Oxford Schools*, p. 180.

<sup>51</sup> *Triologus*, ed. G. V. Lechler (Oxford, 1869) IV, xiii, 289–90.

<sup>52</sup> See Wilks, "The Early Oxford Wyclif," p. 74.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 84.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 73, n. 5.

*Philosophy and politics in the thought of John Wyclif*

to cleanse Christ's church in the way it needs. He argues that Wyclif saw himself as a kind of combination of an Apocalyptic John the Baptist, a prophet of the coming age of Purification, and of a latter-day Jerome, who alone was able to interpret Scripture to guide Christians into harmony with *lex Christi*. By this reading, Wilks suggests that the *dominium* texts are comprehensible as the aspect of Wyclif's vision applicable to contemporary mundane political affairs.<sup>55</sup> This approach allows us see the *dominium* treatises as fitting into a much wider, theological program. But that program is so apocalyptically orientated as to detract from the value of *De Civili Dominio* and *De Officio Regis* as articulated expressions of a dialogue running back through Fitzralph, Giles of Rome, Aquinas, and finally to *De Civitate Dei*. If true, the Grace-founded *dominium* notion is still philosophically vestigial. If Wyclif had woken up one morning in 1376 and found envoys from the pope, the archbishop of Canterbury, and the king, all of whom indicated their agreement in accord with *De Civili Dominio*, would he have been satisfied? According to Wilks, he would not have been, and nothing short of the Second Coming would suffice. This may have been the case after 1379, but until then it is possible that Wyclif might have been more conciliatory. To interpret Wyclif as having been primarily a Joachimite chiliast before 1379 is to discount the possibility that a philosophical consistency unites the *Summa de Ente* and the first books of the *Summa Theologie*.

Wilks' approach changed with the edition and publication of the *Tractatus de Universalibus* in 1985. In his 1994 entry on Wyclif in the *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, he placed a much greater emphasis on Wyclif's debt to Aristotelian reasoning than most scholars have recognized heretofore. He explained that Wyclif's guiding philosophical principle was recognition of the importance of striking an Aristotelian mean between truly Platonic realism and excessive materialism.<sup>56</sup> This principle, Wilks continued, is first expressed in Wyclif's earliest writing, namely in his Commentaries on the *Physics* (c. 1366). Wilks envisaged this playing out in Wyclif's rejection of God's perfect knowledge being deterministic in *De Dominio*

<sup>55</sup> Wilks, "Wyclif and the Great Persecution," pp. 51–2.

<sup>56</sup> Michael Wilks, "Wyclif (Jean)," *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, 106–7 (Paris, 1994), pp. 1501–1512. "Wyclif utilisait aussi les commentaires sur la Physique de Robert Grosseteste et de saint Thomas, ainsi que divers commentateurs arabes. Il en venait par là à l'argumentation suivante; tout objet d'étude doit être considéré à partir de deux points de vue opposés, avant que ces deux points de vue soient harmonisés (un peu comme dans la célèbre gradation hégélienne thèse-antithèse-synthèse). Wyclif renforçait ainsi les vues d'Aristote sur la nécessité de trouver un moyen terme entre la 'théologie' du réalisme platonicien et le matérialisme des Sophistes. Tout comme le soleil produit à la fois le jour et la nuit, ou qu'une colonne peut être élancée ou épaisse, tout dépend essentiellement du point de vue selon lequel on regarde" (p. 1505). See also Hudson, ed., *Wyclif: Political Ideas and Practice*, pp. 1–15.

### *The historiography of Wyclif's dominium thought*

*Divino*, and in his call in *De Civili Dominio* and in *De Officio Regis* for the civil and sacerdotal lords to be responsible for elements specific to their spheres of influence.<sup>57</sup>

Several scholars have attempted to provide fuller pictures of Wyclif's thought on the correct ordering of postlapsarian human society. The fullest published attempt has been L. J. Daly's *The Political Theory of John Wyclif*, although its utility is decreased by Daly's tendency to miss the forest for the trees.<sup>58</sup> That is, Daly has carefully described the main points of the practical aspects of *De Civili Dominio* and *De Officio Regis*, paying attention to the conventional subjects of medieval monarchic theory, such as the two swords argument, the relation of king to law, hereditary succession, and so forth, all the while overlooking the fundamental theological purpose of these two works.<sup>59</sup> Most notable is Daly's relative inattention to the concept of *dominium* as a relation between God and Creation, and between men. He begins his discussion with the cursory definition of *dominium* of *De Dominio Divino*, I, i, which is not Wyclif's formal definition, but a working version which he used to elucidate the relation in much greater detail in the rest of the work.<sup>60</sup> Absent is reference to the thirteen acts of *dominium* to which Wyclif refers at the beginning of the third book, from which we can understand the first two books of *De Dominio Divino* as having covered the first three acts (*gubernacio, sustentare, creare*), and the third book as elucidating the second three (*donare, accipere, prestare*).<sup>61</sup> These acts correspond to Wyclif's description of human *dominium* in *De Civili Dominio*. Daly acknowledges that divine *dominium* is indeed something different from that enjoyed by humans, but he passes over the richly developed ties between private ownership and *dominium* that Wyclif uses to show this difference with the briefest glance at its importance.<sup>62</sup> Instead, *dominium* is described in almost exclusively jurisdictional terms, as a political relation allowing one

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1507: "Les réalistes voudraient faire que toute chose soit fondamentalement divine, en déniaient la rationalité au monde naturel; les ockhamistes voudraient renier la Bible en accordant l'existence aux seuls êtres matériels, si bien que la matière elle-même serait un principe éternel; mais les uns et les autres doivent être condamnés et corrigés."

<sup>58</sup> See n. 28, above.

<sup>59</sup> The best place to get a cursory understanding of this fundamental theological purpose is in W. R. Thomson's *The Latin Writings of John Wyclif*, a catalog begun by S. Harrison Thomson in 1925 and published by his son and collaborator. Daly (*The Political Theory*) lists the relevant works of S. Harrison Thomson in print in 1962 in his bibliography.

<sup>60</sup> Daly, *The Political Theory*, refers to *DD*, I, i, 4.7–9.

<sup>61</sup> *DD*, III, i, 199.4–14.

<sup>62</sup> Daly, *The Political Theory*, pp. 67–8: "Hence it is that God is not lord through a regiment of hierarchically subservient vassals, but he governs immediately and directly sustains and holds all that he has. His rule therefore is not like that of other kings. . . . When one speaks of human lordship, then, it is really only a stewardship held from the supreme Lord; for no creature serves another except insofar as he serves his God."

*Philosophy and politics in the thought of John Wyclif*

person to exercise social authority over another. Daly makes no reference to the Poverty Controversy, and pays little attention to the extensive analysis of private ownership Wyclif presents in Book III of *De Civili Dominio*, save to recognize Wyclif's desire to divest the Roman church of its private property. In short, Daly focuses almost exclusively on the *iurisdictio* in Wyclif's *dominium*, viewing *proprietas* as a topic only accidentally related to the concept.

This deficiency is most evident when Daly discusses the later chapters of *De Officio Regis*. In his relation of Wyclif's portrait of the nature of monarchy, he maneuvers around the lengthy discussions of the primary royal duty of ecclesiastical reform, touching on the more conventional political topics of protection of material goods, the relation of the king to law, and the place of clerics in royal service. He refers not at all to the summary Wyclif gradually gives of the primary royal duties towards the end of the work, which include regulation of the episcopal council, of the appointment of priests, and the fostering of theological doctors, which list strays far from the conventional boundaries of monarchical theory.<sup>63</sup> Why did Wyclif end the one work in which he had set out to describe the mechanics of civil rule with a prolonged argument about the royal responsibilities to guiding the clergy? Not only does Daly not approach this question, one would not imagine that such a question might arise, given his discussion.<sup>64</sup> Daly does recognize the importance of examining the thought of Giles of Rome, Ockham, and Fitzralph, and refutes the standing accusations that Wyclif had done little more than crib from *De Pauperie Salvatoris*.<sup>65</sup> Further, he argues against the idea that Wyclif's pen was guided primarily by his association with John of Gaunt, which argument has been fostered by K. B. McFarlane in *John Wycliffe and the Beginnings of English Nonconformity*.<sup>66</sup>

Edith Comfort Tatnall's 1964 doctoral thesis "Church and State According to John Wyclif" strives to show the place of Wyclif's doctrine of political and ecclesiastical reform in light of his theology, and so exceeds the scope of Daly's work. Tatnall's thesis is comprehensive, including historical consideration of the problem of church-state relations in England through the fourteenth century, consideration of formative influences on Wyclif's theory of human *dominium*, and a careful exposition of the

<sup>63</sup> See *De Officio Regis*, ed. A. W. Pollard and C. Sayle (London, 1887), IX–XII, especially 280.22–281.16.

<sup>64</sup> Daly does notice that something is not quite right in *De Officio Regis*, for he says, "In speaking of the duties of the king as a ruler of his kingdom Wyclif is, unfortunately, much briefer than one would wish." Sadly, Daly does not pursue this any further.

<sup>65</sup> Daly, *The Political Theory*, pp. 89–96.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. K. B. McFarlane, *John Wycliffe and the Beginnings of English Nonconformity* (Aylesbury, 1952). This idea is strongly hinted at in Chapter 3, "Wycliffe in Politics, 1371–8," pp. 58–89.

### *The historiography of Wyclif's dominium thought*

proper motives and methods of a just civil lord. Her special strength is in showing how Wyclif's social thought is firmly based in Augustine's, and she has appended a useful collection of especially relevant selections from *De Civitate Dei* to that end. She is generous in her attention to other influences, including canon law and Aristotelian political theory, but devotes little attention to the development of the concept of *dominium* in the thought of Wyclif's more immediate predecessors. She examines the connection of civil to divine *dominium*, and the connections between *De Dominio Divino* and *De Civili Dominio* at the outset of her discussion of the nature of civil *dominium*. Although brief, this section points to the causal force that divine *dominium* has on all instances of created *dominium*, and refers to Wyclif's idea that it serves as a standard or measure for all lesser instances. Tatnall's aim is not to explicate *dominium* as such, so she devotes relatively little space to divine *dominium* outside of the direct bearing it has on civil *dominium*. As a result, she only makes note of the possibility of a universal-particular relationship holding between divine and civil *dominium*.<sup>67</sup> Perhaps Tatnall's only weak point is her failure to explore the ties linking the development of the concept of *proprietas* during the Poverty Controversy to Wyclif's political thought. One would think that every theorist of *dominium* would devote half of his space to an examination of private ownership, and the other half to secular jurisdictional concerns. This is not at all the way things were; for many political theorists of an Aristotelian bent, *dominium* was primarily a concept referring to ownership, and not immediately conceived to be synonymous with civil jurisdictional authority.<sup>68</sup> John of Paris, for instance, whose political theory has much in common with Wyclif regarding ideal end-results, views *dominium* as something wholly unrelated to *iurisdictio*.<sup>69</sup>

William Farr's *John Wyclif as Legal Reformer* is an attempt to illustrate W. R. Thomson's thesis that Wyclif's theology is the underpinning uniting his earlier philosophical realism and his later political ideals.<sup>70</sup> As such, Farr refers to Wyclif's metaphysics as contributing more of a philosophical style to the later *dominium* thought than a substantial foundation. Wyclif's fascination with the atemporal ideal of the church, a kind of universal in

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 145–6.

<sup>68</sup> Cf., for example, Marsilius of Padua, *Defensor Pacis*, trans. Alan Gewirth (Columbia, OH, 1956), XII, xiii–xv. Here he defines *dominium* as synonymous with ownership, and refers not at all to civil government. For more on the anomalous fusion of ownership and jurisdiction in Wyclif's use of the term *dominium*, see Chapter 2.

<sup>69</sup> Arthur P. Monahan, *John of Paris on Royal and Papal Power* (New York, 1974), p. xxx: "The distinction between having dominion and having jurisdiction is as follows: to have dominion is to have possession or property rights; to have jurisdiction is to have the right of determining what is just and unjust." See *De Potestate Regia*, Chapter 6, pp. 22–7, in Monahan's edition.

<sup>70</sup> William Farr, *John Wyclif as Legal Reformer* (Leiden, 1974).

*Philosophy and politics in the thought of John Wyclif*

which the earthly church might be cast, is what Farr believes to be at the root of Wyclif's writings on *dominium*.<sup>71</sup> Farr's argument is that Wyclif's programmatic attempt to strengthen the royal position was well founded in an understanding of contemporary legal precedent, and that he used these precedents to implement his theological ends to improve their utility without perverting their original purpose. Unfortunately, Wyclif's approach was hampered by a too-complete reliance on the contemporary; Farr suggests that Wyclif's transvaluation of legal structure to accomplish his reformatory ends lent itself too easily to becoming outdated by the evolution of English law.<sup>72</sup> This meant that when reform did come to England, Wyclif's program was of no real use through its having become badly outdated, although Wyclif's means, using secular law to effect ecclesiastical reform, had become an established principle.

In his influential *Heresy in the Later Middle Ages*, Gordon Leff has argued strenuously that the doctrine of Grace-founded *dominium* is little more than a red-herring in Wyclif's works.<sup>73</sup> Leff argues that Wyclif believed every priest to have been ineligible for civil jurisdiction on biblical and metaphysical grounds, with Grace-founded *dominium* being but a decorative appendage. He explains that Wyclif did little more than recapitulate Fitzralph and Giles of Rome in his articulation of Grace-founded *dominium* in the first section of Book I of *De Civili Dominio*, and, having dispensed with theory, turned to more pressing matters.<sup>74</sup> Rather than direct his attention to Fitzralph's interest in private ownership, Wyclif is held to have conceived of *dominium* as primarily connected with the justice involved with civil jurisdiction. Leff believes that Wyclif reduced the power of Fitzralph's contention that Grace alone makes for true, divinely sanctioned human *dominium* by making God's justice the means by which human *dominium* is sanctioned.<sup>75</sup> This is a curious argument, for it is unclear whether Leff means that Wyclif has shifted the justifying element from Grace to divine justice, or whether he is contending that Wyclif wrongly conflates the two. Leff's claim that Wyclif's emphasis on

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.      <sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 172–3.

<sup>73</sup> Leff refers to *De Dominio Divino* as "an early work, which has little relevance to Wyclif's subsequent ecclesiastical thinking"; Gordon Leff, *Heresy in the Later Middle Ages*, vol. 2, p. 521, n. 3.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 547: "Where Giles had emphasized the dependence of all laymen – kings included – upon the church Fitzralph developed this equation of justice with authority to make dominion exclusively from God. It was a gift which in turn pre-supposed the gift of justice and grace. Only if a man was first justified by God with grace would he rule on God's behalf. Accordingly there could be no dominion without grace as its formal cause; and conversely mortal sin in destroying grace destroyed dominion. These two propositions together with their elaboration said everything which Wyclif was to say and said it more cogently." No distinction is made between natural, evangelical, or civil *dominium* here, nor does Leff discuss divine *dominium* as having a bearing on the issue.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 548.

*The historiography of Wyclif's dominium thought*

the civil lord's need to make human law consistent with divine law in order to govern with true *iustitia* excludes Grace as a factor in the civil lord's *dominium*. But Wyclif stipulates that such consistency is only possible for the Grace-favored. True human justice is an effect of Grace; it is not a substitution for it.

Leff's criticism of Wyclif has two approaches, first, that people cannot know who has been saved and who has been damned, and second, that Wyclif as good as exempted secular rulers from his Grace-founded *dominium* theory. Leff suggests that because Wyclif believes the subjugation of the just to tyrannous rule can be a tool whereby God castigates or instructs, he must be arguing that God sanctions tyranny, thus nullifying the Grace-founded *dominium* doctrine. Wyclif recognized that he could be interpreted in this way, and his arguments against the equation of Grace-founded just human *dominium* with God's use of unjust human *dominium* as a means to divine ends are clear.<sup>76</sup> Leff says in effect that Wyclif was unable to account for any sort of difference between the justice of Solomon's rule, a case of a just individual with temporal power, and the justice that develops out of Nebuchadnezzar's rule, where the just individual lacks temporal power.

Leff's contempt for Wyclif's originality and consistency regarding Grace and *dominium* is surpassed by the contempt he holds for Wyclif as a philosopher. At virtually every turn in *Heresy in the Later Middle Ages*, Leff aims a dart at Wyclif for taking the structurally lovely concepts of his predecessors and making them wholly unserviceable, echoing R. L. Poole who dismissed the worth of Wyclif's philosophy as having the "spurious qualities of Holcot or Strode."<sup>77</sup> An instance of this is Wyclif's arguments that require distinguishing the Elect from the Damned; throughout his

<sup>76</sup> See my discussion of Wyclif on tyranny in Chapter 6, pp. 189–97.

<sup>77</sup> For example, Leff, *Heresy in the Later Middle Ages*, p. 499. See Poole's introduction to *De Dominio Divino*, p. xxi. It is easy to be baffled by Poole's attitude, given the care with which he edited Wyclif's works. He as much as relegates the work to the museum of useless ideas. "I have run very briefly through the contents of this portion of the *De Dominio Divino*, because they are of a character in which all but professed students of the history of philosophy have long ceased to take an interest. Indeed, so far as I am aware, hardly a single work of this description has passed into print for near three centuries: in order to find its models one has to seek among the black-letter quartos of the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. Wycliffe's work is of the spuriously technical type of Holcot or Strode; it has not the true philosophical spirit which, in spite of all his over-refinement, impresses one with admiration in Duns Scotus." Poole overlooks the attentions of John Lewis (1675–1747), who wrote *The History of the Life and Sufferings of the Reverend and Learned John Wiclif, D.D.* (Oxford, 1820). Lewis appears to have begun the campaign to re-examine Wyclif's works, and included extensive (if occasionally unrelated) selections of Wyclif's Latin works in his biography. Lewis begins his work, "It is the usual practice of the men of this world, who hate the light, and will not come unto it, to defame the persons and blacken the characters of those who tell them the truth." One wonders what he would have made of Poole's opinions.



*Philosophy and politics in the thought of John Wyclif*

works, he holds that only the Elect can hold just *dominium*, implying that those who exercise *dominium* are among the Damned. Leff devotes considerable space to showing why this doctrine was so unsettling theologically, and refers later to it as a good reason why Wyclif probably was not serious about Grace and just *dominium*. Wyclif's realism made it impossible to deny that God knows all potential instantiations of every universal before the instantiations were actualized. Thus, God knows eternally who will be among the Elect, so he could not escape the conclusion that God knows who comprise the true church. Had Wyclif not bothered to address the thorny issue of the relation of God's knowledge to created action, Leff's criticisms would be understandable. But Wyclif's earlier philosophical works feature a complex metaphysics of necessity and possibility, and a carefully constructed account of the relation of God's eternal knowing to created action. It is hard to avoid concluding that these treatises deserve attention in an account of Wyclif's theory of just *dominium*.

Leff admitted to having jumped the gun in accusing Wyclif of philosophical sloppiness in his "The Place of Metaphysics in Wyclif's Theology," but fails to correct his misrepresentation of the place of Grace-founded *dominium*. He explains this shift in his view by referring to the recent appearance of the until then unedited *Tractatus de Universalibus*, and rightly recognizes the importance of this work in the corpus of Wyclif's metaphysical works as the classical statement of his realism. But again, Leff holds that Wyclif's doctrine that only the Elect can receive Grace means that nobody can recognize whether a civil lord is damned or not, which means that Wyclif somehow sacrificed the metaphysical consistency of his theory of Grace and *dominium* for political practicability in holding that the civil lord must be the ultimate temporal authority.<sup>78</sup> He argues here that Wyclif might have been serious about Grace and *dominium* when he began *De Civili Dominio*, but that as his program of ecclesiastical reform grew in importance in his mind, he sacrificed it in favor of royal absolutism in *De Officio Regis*.

Most notable is the extent to which other historians of medieval thought have followed Leff's approach. An instance of this is Malcolm Lambert's *Medieval Heresy*, in which Leff's view is championed; here Wyclif is viewed as an anti-authoritarian determinist strangely addicted to royal absolutism.<sup>79</sup> He accuses Wyclif of having held in *De Officio Regis* that secular lords need not rely on Grace for the justice of their temporal

<sup>78</sup> Gordon Leff, "The Place of Metaphysics in Wyclif's Theology," *From Ockham to Wyclif*, ed. A. Hudson and M. Wilks, *SCH Subsidia* 5 (London, 1987), pp. 217–32.

<sup>79</sup> Malcolm Lambert, *Medieval Heresy: Popular Movements from the Gregorian Reform to the Reformation*, 2nd edn (London, 1992), pp. 225–42.

*The historiography of Wyclif's dominium thought*

*dominium*, thus defusing the Grace-*dominium* doctrine.<sup>80</sup> At least Lambert follows the later Leff in recognizing the force of the Grace-founded *dominium* idea in *De Civili Dominio*. The best that can be said of this dismissal of Grace-founded *dominium* from the essence of Wyclif's social and political thought is that it shows how important Wyclif's theology and metaphysics are to his political theory, for without it Wyclif sounds like a political hack sardonically employing theological justifications wherever the mood strikes him. The place of Wyclif's realist metaphysics and his Augustinian reformatory theology in *De Civili Dominio* and *De Officio Regis* will become increasingly evident as we explore his characterization of *dominium* as a portmanteau concept including *proprietas* and *iurisdictio*.

In his recent survey of Wyclif and Wycliffism at Oxford in the late fourteenth century J. I. Catto has argued that Wyclif's metaphysical realism was importantly directive of his thought on *dominium*.<sup>81</sup> Like S. H. Thomson, Catto suggests that Wyclif's argument that universals have a reality superior to their physical instantiations sparked an interest in theological issues like the nature of the Trinity, interpretation of Scripture, and the Incarnation. Catto notes that Wyclif's first discussion of *dominium* appears in *De Compositione Hominis* (1372), a treatise on the relation of form and matter in the Incarnation, suggesting that the vigorous counter-arguments Wyclif encountered from William Woodford and others in response to this treatise planted the seed that germinated in the *dominium* treatises.<sup>82</sup> Most importantly, Catto recognizes Wyclif's belief that created *dominium* has God's *dominium* as its exemplar, its universal, although he does not refer to the explicit articulation of this principle in Chapter 10 of *De Universalibus*.<sup>83</sup> The connection perceived by Thomson and Catto will direct our examination of the *De Universalibus* and its connection to the first books of the *Summa Theologie*.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 237. He continues in n. 52, "I follow Leff, *Heresy*, pp. 546–9. He differs from M. J. Wilks, "Predestination, property and power: Wyclif's theory of dominion and grace" . . . yet both dethrone the doctrine of dominion from its former position within the totality of Wyclif's beliefs."

<sup>81</sup> J. I. Catto, "Wyclif and Wycliffism at Oxford 1356–1430," *The History of the University of Oxford*, vol. 2: *Late Medieval Oxford* (Oxford, 1992), pp. 175–261. See also his "John Wyclif," *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward Craig (London, 1998), vol. 9 pp. 802–5.

<sup>82</sup> See Thomson, *The Latin Writings of John Wyclif*, pp. 36–7; *De Compositione Hominis*, ed. R. Beer (London, 1884), I, 2.21–7; Catto, "Wyclif and Wycliffism," p. 194.

<sup>83</sup> Catto, "Wyclif and Wycliffism," pp. 200–01; *Tractatus de Universalibus*, X, 236.680.